

through the looking glass by thenewromantics

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Summary:

it's the ten year reunion for the hawkins high school class of nineteen eighty nine and everyone is having different feelings on the matter. the only thing that everyone can agree on is that mike wheeler and jane hopper are just as in love as they were in high school.

aka, a high school reunion fic.

through the looking glass

Author's Note:

hello pals! like i said in the authors note of my zombie apocalypse fic, this week is mileven week! this fic was actually written for the day three prompt of "high school reunion" and while it's a couple days late, i still wanted to post it because i'm actually really proud of it and really had a lot of fun writing it! so i hope you enjoy!

mad thank you to ally (paranoids) for reading the first half of this and encouraging me to finish it. also thank you to julie (FateChica) for not only being a cheerleader but also for partially inspiring this fic with her fic 'love you like a love song' if you've read that fic, you'll probably know what i'm talking about.

anyways, enough rambling. enjoy and let me know what you think!

Jennifer Hayes

If there was one feeling that Jennifer could use to describe her current state it would be, anticipation.

Not quite all the way to excited, but far beyond nervous. Anticipation was the feeling that was swirling in the pit of her stomach as she stepped into the familiar Hawkins High gym. It's not that she didn't want to be here, no she did, at least she was pretty sure she did, it's just that she really didn't know what to expect.

Wow, ten years. Ten years since she had last stepped foot in this place. It felt both like a whole other lifetime ago and like it had all passed in the blink of an eye. Mrs. Duval, the well loved Vice Principal, who was manning the welcome desk in the lobby had told her it was a good turnout, and she was right. About seventy or so of Jennifer's classmates were mingling around the moderately decorated space, and Jennifer didn't know where to start.

Luckily, she didn't have to make that decision herself as only mere moments later and hand was grabbing her elbow and capturing her attention.

"Jenny, hi!" Smiling, Jennifer turns towards the sound of the voice, trying not to show her discomfort with the juvenile nickname that she had abandoned as soon as she got to college.

"Stacy!" Jennifer said, trying to sound as genuine as possible. Stacy *had* been her best friend in high school after all, but Jennifer could tell by the look on Stacy's face that she hadn't changed much since they were teenagers. The familiar, unkind glint was shining in her eye that made Jennifer uneasy.

"How are you?" Stacy asked, brushing her own hair over her shoulder, drawing Jennifer's attention to the black of the tattoo that lay across her shoulder. *God*, Jennifer felt like she was back in high school again, feeling inferior to her cool best friend.

"Uh, I'm alright." She replied, giving a tense smile. Stacy smirked, almost like she knew her affect on Jennifer. That made Jennifer's stomach drop and she hated that after all these years, Stacy still had this kind of affect on her. "And you?"

Stacy smiled, showing her teeth. "I'm perfect." Then, in the same way Stacy had done for years, she leaned forward, her mouth close to Jennifer's ears. "But I don't think Kelly Spinkleman would say the same, I hear her husband left her for the next door neighbor."

And somehow that was all it took, and Jennifer hated herself for it, to cast her back under Stacy's spell. She spent the next hour trailing Stacy like a comet, following her from group to group, talking with her former classmates and then tensing up as Stacy would whisper to her.

She hated the lack of control she felt that she had. She had spent four years in college, getting her degree all on her own. After, she had moved to Chicago, living on her own and making her own life for herself. She was too good to be following her former best friend around like a lost puppy dog.

But, she supposed some things never changed.

Eventually she found herself by the bleachers, laughing as Joe Kinkle, a former football player who had joined the army and was home on leave, told her a joke when movement by the front door caught her eye.

While most of her former classmates had either entered alone, or with someone Jennifer didn't recognize, the two figures by the front door were undeniably together, and Jennifer recognized both of them as members of Hawkins High's graduating class of 1989.

Mike Wheeler and Jane Hopper looked exactly as she remembered. Mike was as tall as could be, towered over most everyone, his black hair looking slightly windswept, his skin pale and almost translucent in the dim light of the decorated gym. Jane, on the other hand, was a little taller than she had been in high school, and her hair was a little shorter, but her skin was still smooth and her eyes still wide and bright and expressive.

It didn't take long for Jennifer to realize that they were here together, she saw the way their eyes locked and the way their fingers were laced together in between them, almost as if nothing could ever tear them apart.

She heard a snort to her left. A dangerous, angry flutter ran up her spine.

"Look, it's Mr and Mrs. Loser." Stacy said softly, earning a weak chuckle from Joe, who met eyes with Jennifer, clearly just as uncomfortable as she was. "Word on the street is that little Janie Hopper spent like 6 months in a psych ward before she married Wheeler, guess she needed to be diagnosed as completely crazy in order to marry him." Stacy said with a loud snort, taking a sip of her drink.

Clenching her fists, Jennifer felt her face go hot. "God! Stace, aren't you sick and tired of being a complete and total bitch by now?" She exclaimed, throwing her hands up in the air, causing her drink to go splashing over the rim of her cup. "It's been ten years, have you really been that miserable since high school."

Stacy had the gall to look embarrassed, her face flushing. Jennifer didn't know exactly what it was that caused her to snap, maybe it was because Stacy was talking to her just like her ex had before he had dumped her last month, insisting that she was "pushing him" into a relationship he wasn't ready for. She wasn't sure, but all she knew was she was sick and tired of hearing Stacy bitch about everything and everyone.

"Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to go say hi to some of our former classmates, feel free to go be a bitter bitch somewhere else." And with that, Jennifer turned on her heels and for the first time in her life, she walked away from Stacy.

Making her way through the crowd, Jennifer found herself watching Mike and Jane again. They were standing off to the side, talking to Dustin Henderson, one of their close friends from high school. They both had easy smiles on their faces, and looked just as, or even more from what Jennifer could tell, happy that they had in high school.

It both warmed and broke her heart at the same time.

Warmed, because Mike and Jane were good people, she knew that. Jane, despite being new in high school, was always kind and well spoken, never being mean to anyone. Mike had always been a little prickly, from what Jennifer remembered, sometimes picking fights with people who tried to hurt his friends, but she knew that all came from his heart. So, it pleased her that they were happy, she knew they both deserved it.

However, it broke her heart because she was twenty eight, the same age as them, and wasn't even close to finding a love like that. And she never had been, not even once. She thought she might have found it in her last boyfriend, but like all of her other relationships, that one had gone up in flames too.

So, as she watched Mike and Jane Wheeler, she knew from her mom that they had married a couple of years ago, laugh with their friend and look nothing short of blissfully in love, her heart ached

But, she supposed the kind of love they had wasn't meant for everyone.

Christopher Heller

Chris did *not* want to be here.

He didn't even know what had compelled him to say yes. Actually, yeah he had. His mom had heard about through her string of gossipy friends and had immediately called him practically begging him to come home for a visit. Truth be told, when his mom had called, he had already forgotten about the reunion, having thrown the envelope away right after it had come through the mail.

He did *not* want to go see everyone that he went to high school with. But, it was impossible to say no to his mom these days, after his dad's death and his sister getting married and moving across the country. She was lonely and desperate for company, so Chris swallowed his pride and drove the 45 miles home that weekend. All so he could eat cold food and mingle with people who probably didn't even remember him.

Great. Definitely his idea of a good time.

So far he had been here for a total of thirty minutes and he had talked to a total of two people, and one of them was Mrs. Duval when she had handed him his nametag. The other was his chemistry lab partner, Louis Porter, who had asked him how he was before disappearing into the crowd of theater kids, the same crowd he had run with in high school.

To Chris, it was looking more and more like some things really don't ever change. The nerds were always going to be outcasts, hiding on the sidelines. The theater kids were always going to be loud and overzealous, bringing attention to themselves and the jocks and cheerleaders were going to be the center of attention.

That left Chris with nowhere to go. He hadn't had a place in high school and it seemed like he didn't have one after high school either.

God this exactly why he didn't want to come here. His life was good now, he had friends and a job and made good money and survived on his own. He had done well in forgetting the loneliness of high school. But now it was all crashing back down on him like a tidal wave.

In his attempt to swallow down those familiar feelings, he found himself by the food table, not really paying attention to anyone or anything, but blending in quite nicely with his surroundings. He had registered a couple of people come up and grab food, but no one said anything to him. Until now, of course.

"Chris, is that you?" His ears perked, tilting his head towards the the voice and when he laid eyes on the source, he smiled. Jane Hopper.

There was a certain light that seemed to come with her and Chris new how pathetic it was, but he swore his heart physically lifted in his chest when he looked at her. Time had done her very well, yes she had always been pretty, he noticed that all too well during their semester as research partners in history class, but now she was beautiful in a way Chris had never seen in her before.

"Jane?" He says, even though he knows it's her. He spent so long looking at her in high school, he doesn't think he would ever be able to forget her.

"Chris, how many times did I tell you that you could call me El?" She asks, a light smirk across her face. He blushes. She had told him before that while Jane was her name, her friends called her El. There was something about it that didn't seem right though, he always felt like he wasn't close enough to her to use it.

"Sorry." He says sheepishly, trying to quell the burning of his cheeks. "So, how are you? What have you been up to?" He asks, shoving his hands into his pockets and taking a step towards her. She's a little taller than he remembers, but one quick look down at her feet confirms that she's wearing heels.

"I'm pretty good. Nothing in life to complain about." She smiles widely, brushing her hair behind her ear. It's shorter than it was in high school, swishing against her cheek. "I'm living in Boston which is a refreshing change from Hawkins, that's for sure. What about

you?"

He shrugs, looking down at his feet before catching her glance again. "I live in Indianapolis, and recently got a job at a development company."

Jane's mouth purses open in excitement. "Chris! That's great, I'm so happy for you." For a second Chris thinks she might hug him but she merely rocks forward on her feet and squeezes his arm. "For a while Mike thought he might want to do something like that, but he decided it wasn't for him, it seems perfect for you though."

Whatever elation Chris had been feeling deflated. Mike Wheeler. Chris had always had a strange irritation for him all throughout high school, part of him knew that a lot of that was because of his crush on Jane and Jane's subsequent relationship with Mike. But there was also things about him that just *bothered* Chris, not that he would ever admit that to anyone.

"Oh yeah, it's a pretty good fit I guess." Chris shrugs, trying to sound unbothered, because seriously how embarrassing was it to get mad that a girl you had a crush on in high school and is still with the boyfriend you knew she had in high school. "So, you and Mike are still together."

And with that, the biggest smile Chris has ever seen spreads across Jane's face. "Yeah!" She exclaims. "Married four years this November." It's almost like as soon as she tells him, the rings on her finger shine.

Chris nods, the genuine excitement and joy on her face sending a weird shiver down his spine. On the one hand, he's swirling with juvenile jealousy, that he *knows* is uncalled for but he can't help it, but on the other hand, he's happy for her. Jane was one of the few people who had been kind and open towards him all throughout high school, so she was certainly deserving of being as happy as she was.

And as she wishes him goodbye, patting his hand and telling him it was good to catch up, before disappearing into the crowd, only a part of him wishes that it was him that was making him as happy as she was.

But, when he sees her with Mike, immediately wrapping her arms around him, Mike responding with a wide smile and a soft kiss to the top of her head, he knows. He knows that despite his crush on Jane, and his soft desire to know what it feels like to be with her.

She's exactly where she's supposed to be.

Lilian Duponte

Lily Duponte was excited. So much so that excited didn't even feel like the right word.

She know it might seem strange, to be so excited about a measly high school reunion but it had been *years* since she had seen anyone, ten to be exact, and she was itching to go back. It's not that life hadn't been kind to her since high school, it had, in a sense, but she still felt like high school had been where she thrived most.

President of the Decathlon team, cheerleader, girlfriend to the star basketball player. Lily had had everything going for her, so stepping back into that gym was almost like coming home. She had spent so many hours in this gym, had some of the best nights of her life here. It was perfect.

That was until she caught sight of *him* .

No, not Gregory, her ex boyfriend, she would truly be surprised if he showed up here tonight. She knew he thought he was too good for this place even though she was pretty sure he was living in his parent's basement. God, she can't believe she ever thought he was the one, but she stopped caring about him a long time ago.

So no, Gregory was not who she was talking about. Unfortunately, she was talking about none other than Mike fucking Wheeler.

Of course he showed up tonight, on a night that was supposed to be fun for Lily, where she was supposed to reconnect with her friends

and have a good time. But, no, the universe wanted to remind her of the existence of the biggest thorn in her side all throughout her high school career.

He was standing off the side, barely in her eye line, but it was undeniably him. He still had the same dark black hair that swept across his face, looking windswept and like someone had run their fingers through it one too many times. He had on the same dorky sweater and corduroy pant combination that he had worn every single day, which made him look like just as much of a loser as she remembered.

It made her blood boil.

It's not that Mike didn't have a right to be here, he did. He had graduated just like she had back in 1989 on that blistering hot day in the middle of June, right here in this very gym, it's just that she really did not want him to be here.

God, and he probably had no idea either. No idea how much his mere presence made her skin crawl. He was too busy being a self righteous know it all who took joy in one upping other people and spewing facts that no one cared about just to impress the teacher.

Lily had almost lost her *well deserved* valedictorian spot to him. Something that she had worked extremely hard on all throughout high school. All because he didn't know how to keep his mouth shut.

"What are you looking at?" Caroline, one of her friends and former teammates said, nudging her with her elbow, trying to follow Lily's eyeline. Lily glanced at her friend, seeing a confused expression on her face when she realized what Lily was looking at. "Why are you staring at those kids who were in AV Club together? Mike and Lucas or whatever their names are."

Lily huffed, crossing her arms over her chest. "Why do you think they decided to come. It's not like they were popular or anything, or had any friends outside of each other."

Caroline, shrugged, taking a sip of her drink. "I don't know." She looked like she also didn't really care that much, even though she

had been there for almost all of Lily's rants and frustrations. "Maybe they just wanted to see what everyone has been up to, I don't really care that much."

"Did you hear that Wheeler published a book and it became like a huge hit?" Lily's eyes widened, her eyebrows ascending into her hair. She glared at Peter Travers, the source of the information, who nonchalantly took a bite of the mini hot dog he was eating.

"He what?!" Lily exclaimed. No, Mike Wheeler couldn't have written a book, that wasn't possible. He was a loser, a total loser, while yeah he was smart (she *knew that* very well), he wasn't destined for greatness the way some people were. That was just the way the world worked.

Loser nerds stayed loser nerds forever. They got meaningless IT jobs and helped the world by fixing computers in office buildings. They didn't write books, especially ones that became popular.

"Yeah, that's what I heard. It was some sci fi book, hit like the top of the best selling chart, apparently they already want him to write a sequel or something like that." Peter said, still not seeming to grasp how big of a deal this was, having moved on from his mini hot dog and now enthusiastically enjoying a crab cake.

Lily's stomach lurched, an unknown feeling swirling inside of her. It wasn't anger, no, she knew what anger felt like. It wasn't quite sadness either, although there were definitely twinges of it in there, crawling into the crevices and making itself known. Then, like being thrown off a cliff and hitting the ground, she realized.

Jealousy.

She was feeling *jealous* of Mike Wheeler. What. The. Fuck.

"Hey, you okay?" Caroline asked, suddenly worried as Lily felt her face go pale. Bile was building in the back of her throat and she swallowed it down, roughly and harsh, willing it away, desperately trying to rid herself of this feeling.

"Yeah, I just need to go sit down." Pushing away, Lily weaved her

way through people, not stopping even when someone tried to get her attention. She didn't stop until she was at the tables in the corner, throwing herself in a chair.

Her breaths were heavy and hard as she sat there, her skin hot. Discomfort was crawling all over her skin and she wanted to itch it away, it was like a bad rash that was tickling its way up her neck and down her arms.

Frantically searching the room with her eyes, Lily felt like she had received a swift punch to the gut when she laid eyes on Wheeler again. Like a few minutes earlier, he was still enthusiastically involved in a conversation with Lucas Sinclair, who Lily knew because of his two year stint on the basketball team, instead this time there was a third member. Lily recognized her as Jane Hopper, Mike's high school girlfriend and by the looks of it, they were still together.

Hot, bitter jealousy coursed through her veins as she watched them together. Mike had his arm around her, his head tilted so his cheek was brushing against the top of her head. The smile on his face was one of happiness and contentedness.

Lily hated every part of it.

She didn't understand it. She had gone to college, graduated with a degree in communications, been a part of a sorority and what did she have to show for it? A nine to five job that barely put food on her table, a ratty apartment that she lived in all by herself. A string of unsuccessful relationship after unsuccessful relationship.

How had this happened?

How had *she* been the one to end up in the dead end job, unhappy and alone, while losers like Mike Wheeler were successful and happy? This wasn't the way things were supposed to go.

Shaking her head roughly, she swallowed down the bile that ticked up her throat, trying to ignore the hot tears on her face. She realized now that this wasn't just about how Mike was more successful than her, no, it was the soul crushing realization that she had not

accomplishing *anything* .

She had nothing to show for any of her accomplishments, her decathlon success, her academic greatness and her years of cheerleading had amounted to nothing.

But Mike Wheeler, she realized as she looked at him across the gym, all warm smiles and confidence radiating off of him. He had *everything* .

Mike Wheeler

Despite the smile that he could feel on his face, there was a weight lifted off of his shoulders as he stepped out into the night air, the noise from the stuffy, decorated gym fading behind him.

“I had a lot of fun tonight.” El said next to him, snuggling into his side. The late January evening wind was chilly and Mike knew her closeness was just as much to stay warm as it was to be affection. He had no problem with it either way.

He sighed in small agreement. “Yeah, me too. Definitely more fun than I thought I was going to have.” He admitted, earning him a loud laugh from El, who bumped him with her hip. Although, her hip was far lower than his, so she mainly got his thigh.

“I don’t want to say I told you so...” She teased, causing him to look down at her and roll his eyes. She was smirking and her skin was red and flushed in the moonlight. A testament to how much fun she had really had.

He shook his head, resisting the urge to grin. “But you’re going to anyway.”

El laughed, throwing her head back, her hair blowing wildly in the wind, despite its short length. “I just might.” They’ve made it to their car in the parking lot by now and El leans against the side of it,

keeping their hands intertwined. "I just thought you weren't giving it a fair shot when you immediately thought you weren't going to have fun."

Mike considered this for a moment, before conceding with a nod. "It's just..." Mike paused, trying to find the right words to say. "I didn't have the best time in high school, people were mean and I know it's not fair to judge who people are now, but I don't know..." He trails, shrugging his shoulders.

He tries to avoid El's gaze, but he catches it and she smiles sympathetically. "I know, but you can't just pretend that high school never happened." She comments, running her hand up his arm.

Mike pouted, now more as an exaggeration than anything else. "I can try." He muttered, watching as El playfully glared at him, rolling her eyes. "Especially when I walk in there and people that used to ignore me every single day are now suddenly acting like we're friends all because I wrote a book."

He tries to keep some of the bitterness out of his voice, but he fails, the bite sliding off his tongue and lacing in his words. El drops her glare, moving her body closing to his. Mike knew that he was being a little dramatic, only a couple people had done that, most people who congratulated him sounded genuine and sincere, but it was still hard to ignore the weird feeling that came along with surrounding himself with people that used to tease him and ignore him all through high school.

"I know, and I know that it's hard." El whispered, her voice muffled against the fabric of his jacket. "But all those experiences made you who you are. High school Mike lives in you." El said, propping her chin up on his chest and gazing up at him. "Everything that happened to you, good or bad, in high school helped you become the person that you are now."

El paused, giving him a small smile. Mike felt that familiar flutter in his chest that he usually did and he was once again reminded of how lucky he was to have her.

"And I happen to really love the person that you are." El said softly,

her hand finding his and squeezing it. "Sometimes in order to see how far we've come, we need to remember who we once were."

There was a moment of silence between them, peaceful and contemplating. Mike considered El's words before allowing a smile to overcome his face.

"You're right." He said after a second. "As usual," El laughed, but allowed him to continue, "I've changed a lot since high school, grown into a person that I finally feel like I can be proud of. I guess I didn't really realize it until I walked back in there." He took a deep breath, the weight of the moment not going unnoticed by either one of them. "Although, one thing hasn't changed about me at all."

El's eyebrows crinkled together in confusion. "And what's that?"

"You." He said, a grin on his face. "I loved you in high school and I love you now. You've been there for everything that's happened, you were there then and you're still here now." Mike swallowed roughly, the familiar overwhelming feeling of love that he often felt when it came to El swirling up inside of him. "I wouldn't be the person that I am today if it wasn't for you."

"Mike..." El whispered, and Mike didn't miss the unmistakable wobble to her voice.

"I'm serious." Mike said, before she could argue. "From encouraging me to write because you knew it was what I really wanted to do, to convincing me to come to our high school reunion. You've helped me in so many ways and I don't know what I would do without you."

It amazed Mike sometimes. That even after fourteen years together, he was still finding ways to be absolutely amazed by her and everything that she had done for him. He didn't know how it continued to happen, but he knew that he never wanted to stop being amazed by her.

"Thank you for convincing me to come tonight." He said softly, dropping a kiss to the top of her head.

"Anytime." El whispered. "You ready to go?"

Mike sighed, looking towards the school again. He gave a small smile, feeling weirdly melancholic, but still happy all the same. "Yeah, let's go home."

With that, Mike and El both bid Hawkins High one last glance, Mike's heart finally feeling at ease. And as they drive away, ready to get back to reality, Mike doesn't look back, but he knows he'll never forget about what he's leaving behind, but now he won't grimace or frown, he'll smile.

And that's all thanks to El. Just like everything else seems to be. Not that he's complaining.

Author's Note:

this fic was truly so much fun to write and i honestly DIDN'T mean to get so caught in my mike wheeler feelings in the last section, but oh well. i hope you guys enjoyed!

until next time!